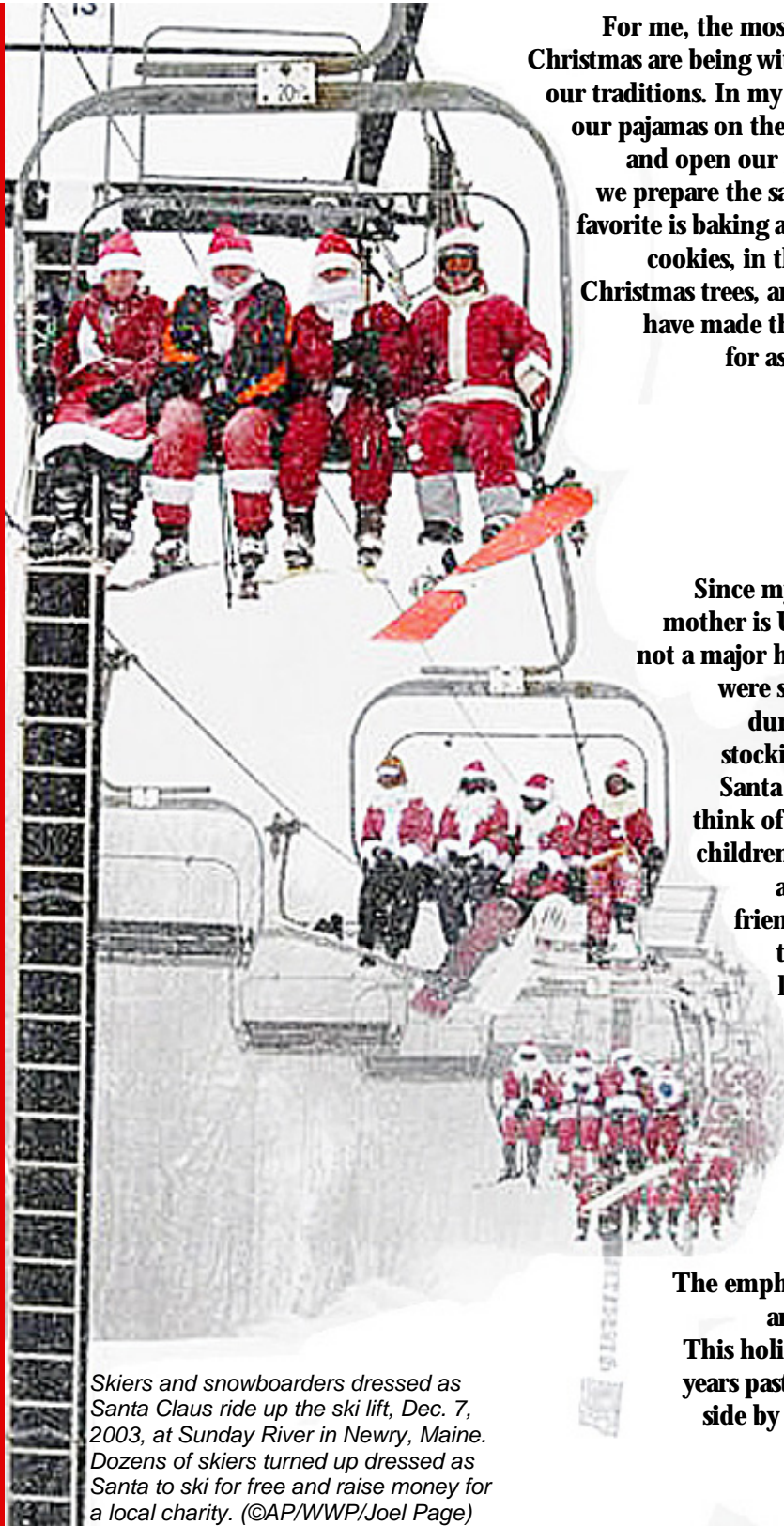




'TIS THE SEASON

"'Tis the season to be jolly, Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!" Sound familiar? The time before and during Christmas in the United States is indeed the season to be joyful, to decorate the Christmas tree, send and enjoy received Christmas cards, as well as to buy and wrap Christmas gifts for family and friends.

However, controversies also surround Christmas in the United States. Some people fear the holiday have become commercialized with shops being decorated with Christmas ornaments from the end of November to lure in more customers. Others wonder whether the large number of Americans who embrace religions other than Christianity do not feel excluded from such an omnipresent celebration. Zoom asked some Americans what they felt was most important about Christmas. Read their answers on the right.



Skiers and snowboarders dressed as Santa Claus ride up the ski lift, Dec. 7, 2003, at Sunday River in Newry, Maine. Dozens of skiers turned up dressed as Santa to ski for free and raise money for a local charity. (©AP/WWP/Joel Page)

For me, the most important things about Christmas are being with family and celebrating our traditions. In my family, we always put on our pajamas on the night of December 24th and open our gifts. On Christmas day, we prepare the same foods every year - my favorite is baking and decorating Christmas cookies, in the shapes of Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and stars. My sisters and I have made these cookies at Christmas for as long as I can remember.

Rachel

Since my father is Jewish and my mother is Unitarian, Christmas was not a major holiday for us. When we were small, we lit the menorah during Chanukah and hung stockings on Christmas eve for Santa to fill. As an adult, I still think of Christmas as primarily a children's holiday - a time to give and receive presents from friends and family. It is also a time to think about those less fortunate and to help the needy by participating in various charitable activities.

Anna

The emphasis on family and giving are most important to me. This holiday helps us to reflect on years past and welcome the future side by side with people who are important to us.

Karen

■ Peace, Happiness, iPod?

When asked by polling institutions, Americans reveal that what they wish for most in the holiday season 2005 is peace, happiness and good health. Then, however, a much longer list of purchasable items follows. Let's see what electronic tools and gadgets are objects of desire by many Americans this season.

According to some surveys, every third American hopes to get an item in the category of consumer electronics with the MP3 player being the hottest seller. Following the MP3 player, the



The RipFlash Pro, left, a flash memory based combination MP3 player/recorder and voice recording device, and the Flipster, a multimedia player from PoGo! Products, are shown. The Flipster allows users to watch full motion videos on a full color display, store and listen to MP3 audio, view high resolution still images, record voice memos and play games. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)



Kodak's prototype digital camera built in 1975 by Eastman Kodak engineer Steven J. Sasson, is shown next to Kodak's latest digital camera, the EasyShare One, at Kodak headquarters in Rochester, N.Y., Aug. 17, 2005. Soon after joining Eastman Kodak Co. out of college, engineer Steven J. Sasson spent 10 largely uninterrupted months in a research lab creating the world's first digital camera. (AP Photo/David Duprey)

wish list includes, in order of preference: plasma television, digital camera, laptop PC, big screen TV, desktop PC, video game system, high-definition television, DVD recorder and home theater speakers or system.

The average lifespan of the most popular and already iconic MP3 player around the world - the iPod - is about 1.5 years. Older models are most often handed down to family members or friends, but they can also be sold or traded-for a new one. Some people actually hunt out-dated models at Internet auctions because they like their by now "retro" look.

The iPod or other MP3 player owners can use services such as Apple's iTunes and Napster for fee-based digital downloading. They pay per month for an unlimited number of songs or for each track. In 2004 consumers purchased over 91 million digital tracks, a 376% increase from the year before! Over 35% of Americans aged 12 and older have paid to download music.

What's in the future for electronic gadgets? According to an article in *Wired* magazine, the gadgets of the future will be simpler, meaning they will no longer combine dozens of functions as most people look for just a few in one product. This applies not only to portable devices but also to computer software. Moreover, mobile phones are likely to influence our social lives to an even greater extent. We can expect mapping programs that show us whether any of our friends are nearby, reference software to look up the restaurant where we might have a meal, and better functioning voice-recognition applications.



A player tries Activision's Tony Hawks Pro Skater video game release on the "N-Gage," Nokia's hybrid phone. The Tri-band EGSM 900/GSM1800/GSM 1900 phone included features: Bluetooth, digital music player and recorder, stereo FM radio, MP3, AAC, Midi, WAV ringing tones, and WAP over GPRS. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)



The Creative Zen Portable Media Center sports 20 gigabytes of memory and plays loads of multimedia file types, including WMV, ASF, MPG, AVI, MP3, JPG and a host of others. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)



Workers at the Samsung booth of the Consumer Electronics Show at the Las Vegas Convention Center adjust the world's largest plasma television, a 102-inch screen prototype, Jan. 5, 2005. The trade show, which attracts 120,000 attendees, began with a keynote address by Microsoft's Bill Gates. (AP Photo/Joe Cavaretta)

■ A Visit from St. Nick

Below find four (out of six) stanzas of a famous Christmas poem by Clement Clark Moore, a U.S. educator - "A Visit from St. Nick", also known under the title "The Night Before Christmas."

Before the poem became popular, in 1820s, ideas about St. Nicholas varied considerably across the United States. The poem "created" the contemporary St. Nick, or Santa Claus, who is chubby, enters homes via the chimney on the night before Christmas and brings toys to children.

12 Christmas-related words are missing from the poem. Insert them back, selecting from the alphabetical list below.

chimney	chubby
Christmas	elf
fur	hoof
reindeer	shutters
sleigh	stockings
toys	whistle

Language tip!

Could you have guessed that Americans send nearly 2 billion holiday cards each year? This provides them a way to connect with friends and family who often live very far away. For busy people, American companies have begun to offer such services online. You can order your cards online, have the company print your name and holiday messages, and even address the cards and mail them for you! It is however considered proper to at least sign all the cards personally if not add a little note besides the printed greetings.

When you send a card to someone of a different religion, choose one with a secular design (without religious figures or symbols) and neutral text, such as "**Season's Greetings**" or "**Happy Holidays**."

Some other possible simple wordings of your Christmas greetings:

Neutral:

Greetings of the Season and Best Wishes for the New Year

For those who celebrate Christmas:

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

or why not use a quote from a song:

Wishing you a Merry Little Christmas...

If you contact your friends mostly via e-mail, you can send them an e-card from many popular websites including www.amazon.com or www.yahoo.com.

A Visit from St. Nick

*T'was the night before Christmas,
when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring - not even a mouse;
The _____ were hung by the _____ with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,*

*Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the _____ and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature _____, and eight tiny _____,*

*As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of _____, and St. Nicholas too.
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little _____.
As I drew in my hand, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed all in _____, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.*

*He was _____ and plump, a right jolly old _____,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a _____,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy _____ to all, and to all a good-night."*

Clement Clark Moore (1779-1863)

Activity Page

Win a Prize!

To win a prize answer this question:

What percentage of U.S. citizens over 12 years of age have paid for downloaded music?

Send your answer to irc@embusa.es.

Give your name and address.

The deadline is January 15, 2006.

Good Luck!

The winners from the previous issue will soon receive their prizes by mail.

ZOOM
IN ON THE USA

About ZOOM

Zoom is online at www.embusa.es/irc/zoom

Contact us at irc@embusa.es

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Barcelona
Consulado General de EE. UU.
Pº Reina Elisenda de Montcada, 23
08034 Barcelona

Find answers to activities on this page at www.embusa.es/irc/zoom.html

■ Moving Around

In "A Visit from St. Nick" there are many words describing movements of the whole body or its parts. Some are used as verbs and some as nouns. In the exercise below we converted some nouns into verbs. Match the words in the first column and their meaning in the second column.

to stir	to turn something
to wink	to move oneself or something abruptly
to nod	to jump up or forward quickly
to spring	to move the head down and up quickly, usually to signal agreement
to twist	to make a small movement with the whole body
to jerk	to close and open an eye quickly, usually to give a signal

■ Acronyms

The world of electronics just LOVES acronyms. Complete below missing words from the explanations of acronyms.

GSM	Global System for _____ Communications
PC	_____ Computer
DVD	_____ Video Disk
MP3	_____ audio layer 3
WAP	_____ Application Protocol
GPRS	General Packet _____ Service
JP(E)G	Joint _____ (Experts') Group

Discuss

What differences between a Polish and an American high school are you aware of:

- do you think teenagers need mobile cell phones? What for? At what age should you be allowed to have a mobile phone?

- are mobile phones allowed at your school? What do you think about people talking loudly on their phone on a bus or in a restaurant?

- who pays for your phone? Should teenagers earn money to pay their phone bills?

- do you have an MP3 player? Do you have legal music on it? If not, why?

- do you think downloading unauthorized music from the Internet is different from stealing a magazine from a supermarket? Why or why not?

- what do you wish most for - from things you cannot buy - this Christmas? Why?

- what would be your dream Christmas present? Why? What would you buy your best friend for Christmas? Why?

■ Glossary

adjust	- to regulate
application	- here: computer software
charitable	- relating to charity
to embrace	- to take up
gadget	- a small modern specialized device
jolly	- cheerful
keynote	- the fundamental or central fact or idea
lifespan	- length of life
menorah	- a candlestick with seven or nine candles used in Jewish religion
omnipresent	- present everywhere
out-dated	- no longer current
purchasable	- available to buy
stanza	- distinctive part of a poem
survey	- a poll
track	- a recorded piece of music